"Everything scared me..."

Waheeda's admission!

UNFORGETTABLE

An actress of the golden era of Indian cinema, Waheeda Rehman's was an illustrious career studded with such cinematic gems as *CID*, *Pyaasa*, *Chaudavin Ka Chand*, *Sahib Biwi Aur Ghulam*, *Kala Bazaar*, *Guide* and *Roshna Aur Shera*. Yet she was a surprisingly unstarry star, reveals contemporary and friend of 25 years, Nanda.

Our careers began simultaneously but I first met Waheeda at Central Studios. I was working for *Naya Sansar* while she was shooting for *Kagaz Ke Phool*. We happened to pass each other and I smiled at her but she just walked past frowning! I remember wondering just what she thought of herself! Waheeda maintains to date that she never saw me smile. I also discovered that she was a frequent 'frowner'!

I went on to sign *Kala Bazaar* in which she was the leading lady. After three days of shooting, Vijay Anand told me, 'Nanda, from tomorrow you will be doing scenes with Waheeda.' I became defensive immediately. The next day when she walked on to the sets Vijay Anand said, 'Waheeda, you know Nanda, don't you?' 'Yes, of course I do,' she replied. At the same time I blurted out 'No'! Waheeda didn't even seem to notice what I had said. In fact, she smiled at me like a grown-up, amused at a little child.

This incident took place at Guru Dutt Studios, where Waheeda was queen. Two days later, she asked me to have lunch with her – we shared our home-cooked lunch dabbas. We became friendly during the making of *Kala Bazaar*. We had things in common – she was shy, she had no father and she was looking after her family. It was then that she explained why she had passed me by without acknowledging me... 'You belonged to films,' she said. 'I did not. I was so new that everything scared me.' We became more affable but we were not exactly friends. The fact that we were both actresses kept us a little apart.

Our gang comprised Shakila, Jabeen, Waheeda and I. After Shakila and Jabeen got married, the two of us would attend parties, movies and picnics together. I give Waheeda full marks for being the most unassuming film star. She was so mild; I'd lose my temper and ask her why she took things lying down! Even though she would complain she'd always say, 'mujhe jawab dena nahin aata.' She was hassle-free and sincere and she got everything - fame, money, a husband, all at the right time.

As an actress, she was great. I personally liked her in *Mujhe Jeene Do*, *Kagaz Ke Phool*, *Guide* and *Khamoshi*. Even though we watched each other's films, we avoided criticising each other as actresses or discussing prices...too much of the truth hurts. It's only today that we compare notes and laugh!

Waheeda's success lay in the fact that she never lost her balance all her life. She would tell me, 'Nanda, so many terrible incidents have taken place in my life – my first broken engagement, my huge tax raid, the mudslinging but I am happy to have come through it all.'

What could I end by saying? I was fortunate to meet and become friends with such an unselfish human being.